

**HON DOUGLAS WENN**

*Condolence Motion*

**HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the House)** [1.02 pm] — without notice: I move —

That this house expresses its deep regret at the death of the Hon Douglas Wenn, a former member of the Legislative Council for the South West Region, places on record its appreciation for his long public service and tenders its profound sympathy to his wife and members of his family in their bereavement.

President, I want to start, as you did, by acknowledging the family, friends and colleagues who are here as we celebrate the contribution that Doug made: his wife, Eileen; his daughters, Deanne and Sheree; and extended family. There are former members of the Legislative Council here today as well: Hon Cheryl Davenport and Hon Tom Helm. I thank them for joining us as part of this recognition of the work that Doug did.

Hon Doug Wenn was born on 3 May 1948 at St John of God Hospital in Bunbury. He was the son of John and Phillis. The south west would remain his home for life and be central to much that he achieved throughout his 11-year parliamentary career. He was educated at Carey Park Primary School and Bunbury Senior High School, before completing a qualification in painting and decorating through what is now known as Leederville TAFE but was then known as Leederville Technical College. Although he started out as a painter and decorator, Doug held a variety of different jobs throughout his pre and post-parliamentary life, including working for Telecom Australia as a telecommunications technician, taxi owner and driver, takeaway food proprietor and partner in a florist shop with his wife, Eileen. It was perhaps this variety of professions that gave him the life experience to so well represent the region.

Everyone who we have spoken to in preparing today's comments about Doug have consistently said one thing—that above all else he was a dedicated and loving family man. He was particularly proud and grateful for the love and support of his wife, Eileen, whom he married in October 1970, and his daughters Deanne and Sheree.

He was first elected to the Legislative Council to represent the South West Region in 1986 and would go on to serve for 11 years. Close family friend—I know she wanted to be here today but could not be—Tresslyn Smith, provided some insights into Doug, and she remembers —

At the state election in 1983 we were all at the old Bussell Motor Hotel nervously waiting for the results that saw David and Phil Smith be elected to the lower house. Doug was also a candidate for the upper house and thought that he had no chance of winning. For years I have had a clear vision of Doug lounging back on a deep chair saying, “They’re nervous and worried and I’m very relaxed because I know I won’t be elected.”

And, of course, three years later he was elected.

I knew Doug before he entered this place as a member of Parliament when I was a younger activist in the Labor Party, and I know that he was a well-liked, respected and hardworking member. Hon Cheryl Davenport said to me that what you saw was what you got—a gentle man and a very respectful man.

Among his many pursuits, one was perhaps quirkier than the others: his ongoing efforts to improve the safety of members in this chamber. In Doug's own words, when he entered the chamber in 1986, the first thing he did was look for a medical kit, which he could not find, and he raised concerns about the many fire hazards in this place. That led to the introduction of fire drills, and I am advised that, during one of those early drills, the President at the time was heard to remark, “What the bloody hell is that noise?” It was the fire alarm bell that had been put in place as a result of Hon Doug Wenn's concern for our safety.

He formed a very close bond with the former member Hon Tom Helm, who is here today, whom he calls his best friend ever in his valedictory speech and whom he credits with getting him out of a lot of trouble in the past. Tom just shared something with me. He asked whether we still said prayers in here and I said yes, we did. He said, “Doug and I would usually come in after the prayers!” So I appreciate Tom sitting through them today!

Tom also shared the following story —

Doug was from the south west and had never been to the Pilbara so I invited him to join me in Paraburdoo. It was so apparent that Doug had never been to the Pilbara that he did get on a plane to the Pilbara, but went to Tom Price instead and completely missed our rendezvous!

Tom also said that he and Doug shared an office and had some good times when they could ignore the internal politics. He said, “Along with Hon Kim Chance, we were the three musketeers—a bond formed because we were all far from home.”

If Doug's family was the most important love in his life, the second was the community of Bunbury, Busselton and the South West Region. In fact, the Wenn family was one of the first to settle in Bunbury in 1834, so his connection to the area was strong and long lasting.

He arrived in the state Parliament as part of the south west Labor team that was then made up of a close working group of Labor MPs from the area. The other two were the Smith brothers, David and Phil. They had campaigned hard and successfully on creating a new future for Bunbury and the south west, which was then captioned “Bunbury 2000”. Reflecting on the observations made by Doug on Bunbury and the south west in his first speech, he talked about the wine industry that was becoming a tourist attraction and expanding at a fast rate. He said that the Hotel Lord Forrest in Bunbury was about to open and that he was looking forward to the introduction of the new rapid rail *Australind* service. Much of the layout of modern central Bunbury we see today occurred during the time that Doug, David and Phil were in Parliament tirelessly pursuing the betterment of the region. They led the development of the South West Development Authority, the predecessor for the South West Development Commission, which achieved huge change for the region. The opening up of the city square in Bunbury, which was facilitated by the relocation of the railyards, the transformation of Marlston Hill, the preservation of the Busselton jetty, a new Margaret River Hospital, a fire station in Busselton and many other projects were all championed by Doug and his fellow south west members.

He was a highly effective member. One only needs to look at the lengthy list of his community involvement to see how much he loved Bunbury and the south west. He was at various times secretary of the Bunbury Bowling Club, a member of the Bunbury Race Club, vice-president of Volunteer South West and vice-president of the Bunbury Musical Comedy Group. He founded the Bunbury Men of Song and was a founder and life member of the West Coast Athletic League. He was president of the Carey Park Junior Football Club and captain-coach of the Bunbury Dodgers softball team. He played for the Carey Park Football Club and was a member of the Busselton Jetty Preservation Committee, and the list goes on. Doug went on to serve on the City of Bunbury council between 1997 and 1999, and then again between 2003 and 2007.

He was active not only in his community, but also in his contribution to this chamber. During his parliamentary career, Doug held a number of positions, including Deputy Chairman of Committees; member of the Standing Orders Committee, the Standing Committee on Government Agencies and the Joint Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation; Deputy Chairman of the Select Committee on Salinity in WA; and member of the Select Committee on Charitable Organisations. He was also a member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association delegation to Zimbabwe and represented the WA branch at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference in 1991.

Doug was president of Labor’s Bunbury branch and then vice-president of the Busselton branch. He observed in his valedictory speech that at the time he was elected the South-West Province was an unwinnable seat for the Labor Party. He remarked —

If I leave this place with any glory at all—and I think I can leave it with some glory—it is that I am the first and only member of the Labor Party to have won that seat. In the 100 years prior to that election, the seat had been dominated by Liberal members. I am proud to have that record.

Doug Wenn did not let that record-winning election go to waste. He used his time in this chamber to be a fearless advocate for his south west community, achieving much and winning the respect of members on both sides of the house.

On behalf of the government and the parliamentary Labor Party, I would like to express my sincere condolences to the Wenn family for their loss.

Members: Hear, hear!

**HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West — Leader of the Opposition)** [1.11 pm]: It gives me great pleasure to support the condolence motion for Hon Doug Wenn moved by the Leader of the House. As a member for the South West Region, I met Doug personally and I am very pleased to say that he was immensely active around the south west and in Bunbury. Doug Wenn actively served the community of Bunbury and the wider south west before and after his nine years as a member of the Legislative Council between 1986 and 1997. He had the distinction of being the first representative of the Australian Labor Party to win a seat in the former South-West Province.

Doug Wenn was born in Bunbury in May 1948, the son of a waterside worker, attending Carey Park Primary School and Bunbury Senior High School. He left school early to join the workforce, attending Leederville Technical College and qualifying as a painter and decorator. Having worked in the trade for five years, in 1967, he became, first, a technical assistant and, after 1970, a technician for 14 years with Telecom. He eventually served for three years as president of the Australian Telecommunications Employees’ Association.

As a keen sportsman, who won the fairest and best award for Carey Park Football Reserves in 1963, he was president of the Carey Park Junior Football council and captain-coach of the Bunbury Dodgers softball team. As an avid fan of the Donnybrook football team for many years, I can say that Doug Wenn was absolutely passionate about Carey Park. The joy of both Donnybrook and Carey Park was beating South Bunbury, and I think that remains the case today. He was the founder and secretary and a life member of the West Coast Athletic League and was also active in the Bunbury Musical Comedy Group.

Doug Wenn's community involvement led to his strong interest in politics and ultimately to joining the Australian Labor Party in 1981, serving three years as president of the Bunbury branch. At the 1983 state election, he contested the South-West Province of the Legislative Council, comprising the districts of Bunbury, Mitchell and Vasse. In a straight contest with the Liberal Party, he gained a swing of 8.2 per cent, finishing just 430 votes behind the sitting member of the Legislative Council, Hon Vic Ferry. He achieved 49.1 per cent of the 26 700 votes cast. As someone who has been on the losing end of a very tight election, I can understand exactly how he would have felt.

As a justice of the peace, after 1984, he served as a visitor to Bunbury Regional Prison and also became a board member of the then Bunbury Port Authority that year. He was an inaugural member of the South West Development Authority. Doug Wenn recontested the South-West Province in 1986 and polled 47 per cent of the 28 700 votes. He was approximately 432 votes behind the Liberal candidate. However, the distribution of Australian Democrats preferences gave him a majority of just 60 votes, and with 50.1 per cent, he became the first Labor MLC for South-West Province. On 18 June, he delivered his first speech, covering many aspects of his electorate. He was immensely passionate about his electorate. I know that one of the things he talked about was his great support for the live sheep export trade at the time.

With the replacement of four two-member provinces by the seven-member South West Region at the 1989 election, Doug Wenn was re-elected at the head of the Australian Labor Party ticket that polled 37.5 per cent to gain three quotas. In 1993, he was re-elected from the third position. Obviously, the vagaries of politics and pre-selections are something we all have to deal with. Achieving that result from the third position was excellent, but he did not contest the subsequent election, retiring from Parliament when his term expired in 1997.

Aged 49 years—remarkably young—he resumed his career in small business, which included partnership in a Bunbury florist shop and ownership of the Koombana Bay Fish Farm and Research Centre. However, his community service continued unabated, with a two-year term on the City of Bunbury council from 1997 to 1999 and an unopposed four-year term from 2003 to 2007. He just missed the Donnybrook Football Club's three Ps at about that time. I thought I would just drop that in!

As founder of the Bunbury Men of Song, he won awards at the Bunbury Eisteddfod between 1996 and 1999. He also brought valued comfort to the residents of nursing homes. The group's visits were especially noteworthy. His sporting memberships included a term as secretary of the Bunbury Bowling Club between 1999 and 2000.

I met Doug Wenn a number of times after his political career and during mine. His passion for his community was outstanding. He was a servant of the south west, particularly Bunbury, but not limited to Bunbury. He was a passionate advocate, especially in the sporting field, the rivalry of clubs notwithstanding. But I most remember his singing and the work he did entertaining people in aged care and at community events. The Bunbury Men of Song was amazing to listen to. My memory is that his work was fantastic. I think he made an outstanding contribution.

The opposition absolutely supports the motion before the house. Doug Wenn enjoyed 52 years of marriage to Eileen before his death on 8 November. Our condolences go to her, their daughters, Sheree and Deanne, and their extended family, including, I understand, six grandchildren. Thank you for your attendance today. He was a man who absolutely represented his community and should be remembered as such.

**HON KATE DOUST (South Metropolitan)** [1.18 pm]: I also rise to add words on this condolence motion to acknowledge and recognise the passing of Hon Doug Wenn and his contribution to this place, his community and his family. We have already heard about his very active life, in both the community and his work arrangements leading up to his time in this place. Going back to look at his inaugural speech, he starts by talking about how important it was for him to be here and how he had worked so hard and really looked forward to being in this place. As you work through his speech, you pick up the level of passion he had about the south west, particularly for Bunbury, as was alluded to in my colleagues' speeches.

Members will note that Doug was a man ahead of his time with his views on the need for environmental change and protection, particularly in the south west. In his speech he talks about the issues around the cape, the need for rangers to be put in place and to have government investment. A significant passage of time has passed since he made that first speech, but I imagine—I hope—that he would have seen most, if not all, of the things he talked about in his first speech come to fruition over time. He references the potential for tourism capacity, increased employment opportunities and the growth in the wine sector in the south west. Obviously, those things have come to pass. The south west, particularly around Bunbury, Busselton and Margaret River, areas on which he was primarily focused, now have vibrant industries in the wine sector. They have very active ecotourism. They have encouraged ongoing permanency in employment for local people based in those areas. By canvassing those issues back in 1986–87, he was thinking ahead of his time. He was involved in the South West Development Commission, which was heavily engaged in the Bunbury 2000 program. That program made the jump to enable Bunbury to become the vibrant hub that it is in the south west of our state. The family of Doug Wenn can be very proud of the contribution he made in the lead-up to his election to Parliament with his engagement with those community groups and by volunteering

and engaging politically through the Labor Party in the development of policy, and engaging and lobbying to get those changes through into the south west.

Hon Doug Wenn points out in his maiden speech what the south west could be like. During his time in this place he was very active on committees. We have already heard reference to his work on the Select Committee on Salinity in WA and he worked on a variety of other committees. At that time, Parliament was a vastly different beast from what it is now. There would not have been the same level of staffing. It certainly was not digital in those days. Information was not available 24/7 and members were probably much more isolated from their community, and even their family, because they would have been here. They had longer sitting hours. It was not family friendly. They did not knock off at seven o'clock on a Wednesday night or finish on a Thursday afternoon; there was a tendency to sit long and late and extended hours. I imagine that Doug would have spent a lot of time in this building during his 11 years here.

In his time here Doug was fortunate to be appointed Deputy Chairman of Committees from 1989 to 1993. I know that my colleague sitting across from me, Hon Martin Aldridge, would attest to its being a challenging role in terms of organising the business of the house in various capacities as well as the deputy chairs. I am sure Doug would have risen to that task admirably. It is a significant role in this place.

One of the matters that was not canvassed earlier is one that Doug talked about in his inaugural speech. I imagine that leading up to the changes, the shift from provinces to regions in 1993, electoral reform would have been a hot button topic. I will quote from his speech —

I did intend to speak briefly on electoral reform, but the subject has already been covered by those members who have spoken previously and, no doubt, will be covered by other speakers who will be able to cover the subject much better than I would. I do make the point that there is a need for electoral reform in this State. I did believe that this State has been registered second only to Queensland as the worst gerrymandered State in Australia. However, I have been advised that I was wrong because it is the worst gerrymandered State of any parliamentary system in the world. It is not a situation of which any Western Australian could be proud. Opposition members, as few as they are, should be able to see that it is time for a change. I do not wish to go any further on this subject except to say that I hope the Opposition members, the members of the National Party—who tell me they are intelligent members—and not forgetting the leader of the Independents, will see that a change is needed now.

Sadly, that did not happen to the extent that I imagine the Labor Party would have wanted at that point, or that Doug would have envisaged, but I hope that prior to his passing last year Doug would have raised a glass in celebration of the electoral reform changes that were enacted in Western Australia specifically for the upper house. I hope he would have been pleased that the gerrymander was finally removed.

Much reference was made earlier to Doug's passion for music and his involvement in establishing and being part of the Bunbury Men of Song and participating in musical eisteddfods. That is something to be very proud of. Another former colleague of ours, Hon Tom Stephens, also moved on to a musical career, one might say, after he left Parliament.

I revert to the inaugural speech of Hon Doug Wenn and his involvement in those areas and his love for music. He paraphrases former member Hon Bob Hetherington and finishes his speech by saying —

I am truly not here to entertain you, but I am here to enlighten you.

During his time here Doug worked passionately through the committee system and through his work, engaging with government to do whatever he could to boost and improve the lives of his constituents in the south west electorate, and also to put in place a solid plan for the future for the south west. I think we would all agree that it is a significantly different place now to what it would have been when Doug first stepped into this place. Obviously, some of the credit goes to people like that, particularly around the environment, tourism and the discussion around the port. He talks in his speech about the impact of the port on the working people at the time and the change in the type of product going through the port and the need to enhance the health and safety of those people because of the changed product. Although he was passionate about his locale, he was also very passionate about the people who lived and worked there and he wanted to make sure they had the best arrangements.

Becoming a member of Parliament is indeed an honour and privilege for all of us. When we look at the population numbers and go back to the start of our chamber here, we see that only a small percentage of people in this state are able to step up to the plate and are honoured to take on the role of serving their community. Doug Wenn was keen to do that and was able to make the most of his time here. I note that unfortunately Doug probably left here a little earlier than he had hoped or planned for, but he and his family should be proud of the contribution he made during that time and his relationships. I want to acknowledge his former colleagues in the President's gallery today, Hon Cheryl Davenport and Hon Tom Helm, who served with Doug during that period. The idea of people being here and serving is very important, but we need to also acknowledge the families of those members. I note that in

Doug's final speech he referenced his family and obviously had a great love of family. He talked about the amount of time he spent away from home and away from family, doing his job as a member. As I said, times then would have been very different in Parliament. Members would not have been able to talk with their family on Zoom or make a regular mobile call because those facilities were not available. I acknowledge that he took his seat off the Liberal Party and was the first member in over 100 years. Although there has been a passage of time and many more members have filled those spaces, we can never take away from Doug Wenn the fact that he was the first and that will always be part of his legacy. He states in his final speech —

My family has supported me over many years. All members will know that it is not easy for their families when they join this place. That applies particularly to those members who live in country areas, because they must be away from home sometimes for three, four or five nights a week and that impacts very heavily on a spouse with young children.

His words ring true even now, but it would have been even more difficult then. I note that when he left this place he supported his wife, Eileen, in her business. I want to share this with members; I have done this with Eileen's permission. When I read the funeral notice from Doug's family, I was struck by the beauty of the language and the love that Eileen had articulated. I just want to share this notice with members because I think it is lovely and very heartwarming. Eileen's words state —

We danced into our marriage and continued to dance and sing all our lives. I am heartbroken, my darling Doug, the first and forever 'Love of my Life', my best friend, soul mate and No. 1 supporter passed away this week after his courageous acceptance of his terminal diagnosis. Just days after our 52nd Wedding anniversary.

Most beautiful father of our girls Sheree Ann and Deanne Samantha, best Poppi Doug to Kendall Jane, Jake, Georgia Rose, Jasmin, Emma and Evie. He loved them all dearly.

You cared and worked always for the elderly and those in need. You were true and genuine to your heart during your many years as the Member of Parliament for the South West. You invited and founded the Bunbury Men of Song and also sang with joy with your Vintage Rock. Boys, you guys were the best, you have sung for the oldies in nursing homes, giving them a song in their hearts, they loved you.

Forever in our hearts

I think that we can all be very proud of the service by Doug Wenn, both to this chamber, his community, this state and the love of his family. I think he has demonstrated that passion throughout his time here. I think the fact that we have such a large contingent of people to acknowledge him today is very significant. I offer my condolences to Eileen, his daughters and his broader family and colleagues. We should be very proud of his contribution to this place and to our state.

Members: Hear, hear!

**The PRESIDENT:** Members, in putting this motion, I ask you now to rise and stand in your place to indicate your support for the motion and to observe a one-minute silence in memory of the late Hon Doug Wenn, esteemed former member of this council.

Question passed; members and officers standing as a mark of respect.

**The PRESIDENT:** I advise that in accordance with our custom and practice, a copy of today's *Hansard* transcript of this condolence motion will be forwarded to Hon Doug Wenn's family. Thank you.